

Masonic Hall and Grand Theater
(Grand Opera House)
818 Market Street
Wilmington
New Castle County
Delaware

HABS No. DE-170

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

STATE DELAWARE	COUNTY NEW CASTLE	TOWN OR VICINITY WILMINGTON
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) MASONIC HALL AND GRAND THEATER		HABS NO. DE-170
SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE GRAND OPERA HOUSE		
COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES) 818 North Market Street		
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) 1871 (original drawings)	ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE) (original drawings) Thomas Dixon and Charles L. Carson	
SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE) The Masonic Hall and Grand Theater possesses both historical and architectural significance. It is one of the finest remaining examples of cast iron architecture in America. It is associated with several major events in Delaware's history, but more importantly, it is famous for its rich theatrical associations, having been a significant showplace during (cont.)		
STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE) Second Empire		
MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS) Brick bearing wall on brick foundation; cast iron facade on a structural-steel framework with slate on the mansarded fourth story and a cast iron cresting rail, asphalt roof, wood joists and floors, wood windows and doors.		
SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE) Rectangular, 92' x 211' overall		
EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE Red brick side walls and rear, cast iron facade painted white, single pedimented roof in mansard style sheathed in slate and surmounted by a cast iron cresting rail, classically designed facade divided into five major bays each of which has 3 arched openings resting (cont.)		
INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED) The interior has been restored and includes an entry lobby with an open run stairs with turned balusters which leads to an upper lobby, a theater space of about 1000 seats with a horseshoe-shaped gallery supported on fluted iron Corinthian columns faced with cast (cont.)		
MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES converted to movie theater, 1906-1914; restored 1973-82, James Grieves and Leslie Armstrong, architects and Stephen T. Baird, restoration consultant.		
PRESENT CONDITION AND USE. The present condition is excellent. It contains a theater, a small movie theater, offices of Grand Opera House, Inc., the meeting rooms of the Masonic Order for Wilmington and several small stores along Market Street.		
OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE		
SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.) National Register of Historic Places; Delaware Cultural Resource Survey (N-418)		
COMPILER, AFFILIATION Joan N. Larrivee, State of Delaware, Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs		DATE June 30, 1986

SIGNIFICANCE (con't)

the heyday of American Theater in the last quarter of the 19th century. Upon its completion in 1871, Wilmington could finally boast of an excellent theater for public entertainment. The stage was 37' deep and 75' wide backstage with a proscenium opening 40' wide by 26' high and at the time, was reputed to be the second largest in America, surpassed only by the Hippodrome. Most of the famous performers of the time appeared at the Grand including Little Nell, Ethel Barrymore and George M. Cohan. Plays, minstrel troupes and even Buffalo Bill Cody's Scouts of the Plain provided a varied theatrical fare. Local musical organizations performed Gilbert and Sullivan operettas and oratorios. Lectures on various subjects were presented. The State Republican and Democratic conventions were also held here. The first motion picture was presented in the theater in 1897. After 1906, they were shown on a regular basis and by 1914 they replaced live performances. Throughout the history of the building the Masons have retained meeting rooms on the upper floors of the building and until recently, were the owners of the building.

EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (con't)

on Corinthian columns and containing windows, doors, or statuary niches, a projecting central pavillion surmounted by a pediment containing an eye, a symbol of the Masonic order, projecting outside bays with a pedimented triple window in the mansarded fourth story, hood moulds over the other windows in the fourth story, a rear brick portion with a gable roof and having a corbelled brick cornice which is divided into thirteen bays and which originally contained a double-hung multi-light window on each of the 3 stories.

INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (con't)

iron grillwork, a frescoed domed ceiling, an arcaded corridor at the rear containing a double set of stairs to the gallery, a proscenium with 4 boxes marked by a frescoed panel and a flanked by pairs of marbleized Corinthian columns from which spring marbleized columns connecting each pair, double-hung multi-light windows backed by panelled shutters along each side wall.